

**Connecticut General Assembly
Program Review and Investigations Committee
Testimony of Robert Trefry, Chairperson of CTHSS Board
July 20, 2016**

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Carpino, and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee, I am Robert Trefry, Chairperson of the Connecticut Technical High School System Board, and I appreciate being given an opportunity to testify before you today regarding the suspension of enrollment at our aviation schools for the 2016-17 school year. Superintendent Dr. Nivea Torres could not be here today as she had previously arranged travel plans that could not be changed. I am here to speak on behalf of Superintendent Torres and the Board.

I would like to start by saying that there has been no decision to close the aviation schools. We recognize that programs like these are vital to the long-term economic health of Connecticut.

The decision by Superintendent Torres to suspend enrolling a new class at the Connecticut Aero Tech School in Hartford and the Stratford School of Aviation was not an easy decision, but one that was made through careful consideration of the significant budgetary restrictions facing the Connecticut Technical High School System and the state as a whole. These aviation programs are not sustainable in their current form and the decision to suspend enrollment for next year allows an opportunity to explore all options for the future of these programs. It is important to stress that suspending enrollment will not affect current students in any way and that no final decision has been made regarding future plans for the aviation schools.

We recognize the great value in the opportunities provided by our post-secondary programs, including the aviation mechanic programs in Hartford and Stratford. However, as we continue to scrutinize the budget for the Connecticut Technical High School System in search of significant savings required as part of the overall state budget plan, it is important to note that the core mission of the CTHSS is to educate and serve students in grades 9 through 12. While our post-secondary education programs serve a valuable purpose, CTHSS is closely reviewing this particular program to determine if it is the appropriate agency to oversee it in the long term. It is our responsibility to do everything in our power to ensure continuation of high-quality educational programming for high school students attending schools within our system. We are exploring all options of where to achieve the savings necessary to carry out the core mission of our system.

Having said that, we also recognize that our aviation schools serve the dual purpose of providing training for adults looking to launch careers in the field of aviation manufacturing and maintenance, as well as supplying Connecticut's strong aviation maintenance and manufacturing industry with skilled workers. To that end, we are engaged in discussions with the Board of Regents, as well as major state employers regarding potential partnerships that would enable the programs to continue into the future.

These discussions are very preliminary, but we believe such partnerships have the potential to strengthen the aviation programs overall and provide students with an even richer career-preparatory experience.

Finally, I want to thank Governor Malloy and Education Commissioner Wentzell for supporting the CTHSS throughout the process of identifying substantial budgetary savings while maintaining a laser sharp focus on providing high-quality academic and career technical education to students at our high schools. Thank you also to our legislators for taking an interest in ensuring the CTHSS continues to meet the needs of students and employers in Connecticut. We look forward to the work ahead and I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.